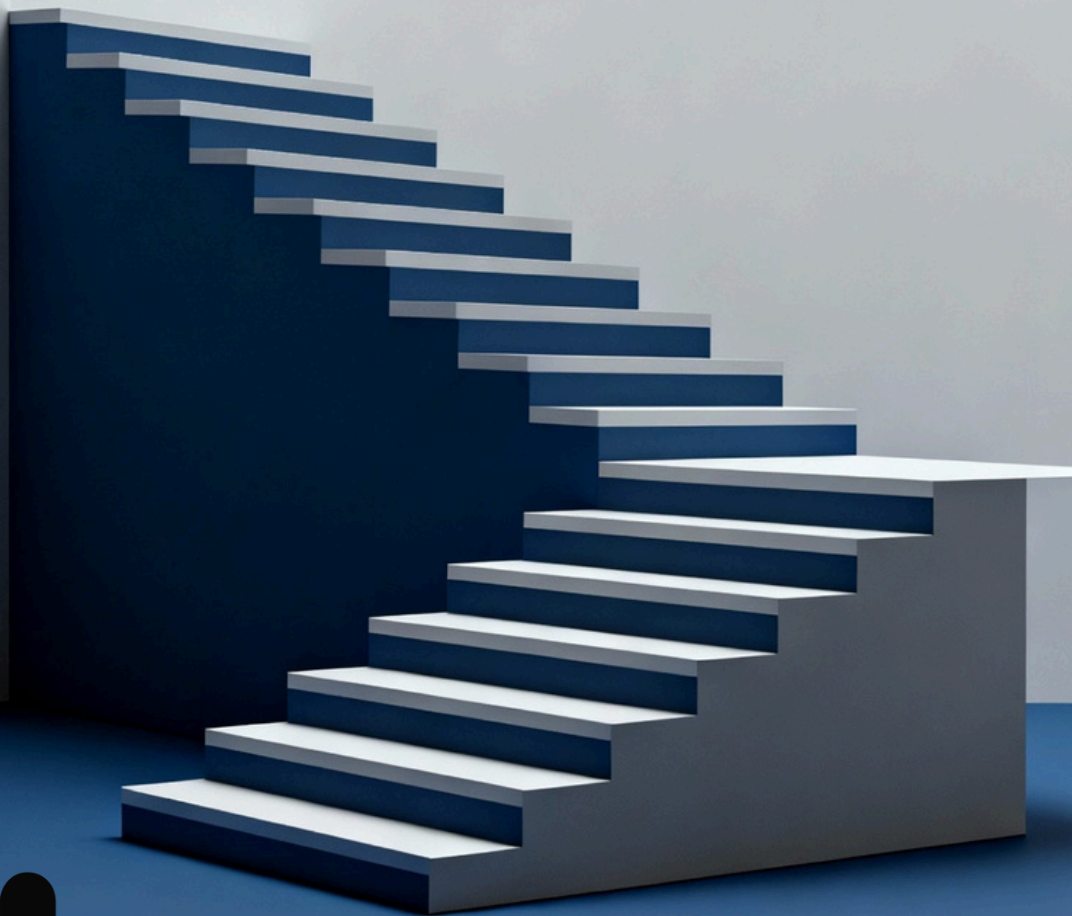


The EEF Implementation Cycle



A Practical eBook for School Leaders



Introduction

Implementation is more than launching a new initiative it's a structured, evidence-informed process that helps leaders turn ideas into meaningful change.

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) outlines four phases that support strong, sustainable implementation:

- 1. EXPLORE**
- 2. PREPARE**
- 3. DELIVER**
- 4. SUSTAIN**

This eBook breaks down each phase with:

What leaders must do
Questions to guide your planning
Tools you can apply immediately



PHASE 1 – EXPLORE

Diagnose the problem before jumping to solutions

The Explore phase helps leaders slow down and get clarity on what actually needs improving.

✓ What leaders must do

Identify a high-priority area for improvement
Understand the root cause (not just symptoms)
Review evidence, internal data, and staff voice

Consider a range of possible solutions
Select the approach that is most appropriate and feasible





Guiding questions

1. What is the exact problem we want to solve?
2. What evidence supports this as a priority?
3. Do we know what's causing the issue?
4. What approaches have been effective elsewhere?
5. Do we have capacity to implement this well?



Leader tip

Avoid “solution chasing.”

The most common implementation failure comes from leaping straight into action without exploring the need fully.



PHASE 2 – PREPARE

Design the implementation process with clarity
and intention

Once a solution is chosen, leaders prepare the plan
that will bring it to life.

✓ What leaders must do

Create a clear programme plan with milestones

Map out who will do what, and by when

Identify training, resources, and support required

Consider potential barriers and success conditions

Define what success will look like

Align the plan with the school's values and
routines





Guiding questions

1. What activities need to happen first?
2. What training or CPD is required?
3. How will we support staff during the process?
4. What challenges might we face and how will we address them?
5. How will we measure progress?



Leader tip

Use an “implementation map” a simple one-page visual overview of your plan.



PHASE 3 – DELIVER

Implement the plan with support, adaptation, and monitoring

Delivery is where the work becomes visible but it must be supported, not left to chance.

✓ What leaders must do

Roll out the programme as planned, but stay responsive

Provide high-quality training and CPD

Ensure staff have time to rehearse and troubleshoot

Monitor early signals of progress

Adjust the approach based on feedback

Communicate consistently





Guiding questions

1. Are staff confident in what they need to do?
2. Are we providing enough coaching or modelling?
3. What early signs show that practice is improving?
4. Do we need to adjust the pace or support?
5. Is communication clear and ongoing?

Leader tip

Delivery is not the same as “launch.”

Support and coaching are the engines of effective delivery.



PHASE 4 – SUSTAIN

Embed and scale the change so it becomes routine
Sustainability ensures that the improvement lasts
beyond the first term, year, or leadership cycle.

✓ What leaders must do

Build new practices into existing systems (appraisal,
planning, routines)

Celebrate progress and share success stories

Continue monitoring and coaching

Scale up only when core practice is secure

Review and refine annually





Guiding questions

1. How will this practice remain consistent next term?
2. What structures support long-term use?
3. How will we refresh training for new staff or changing needs?
4. What evidence shows this has become part of the school culture?



Leader tip

Think: “Will this still be happening a year from now?”
If not, sustainability planning is needed.



The Full Implementation Cycle

**EXPLORE → PREPARE → DELIVER →
SUSTAIN**

Implementation is not linear it's cyclical.

Leaders loop back through the cycle continuously, using new learning to refine future approaches.



Common Reasons Implementation Fails

- Skipping the Explore phase
- Poorly sequenced planning
- Lack of staff support during delivery
- Insufficient monitoring
- No sustainability strategy
- Overloading teachers with multiple initiatives



Appendix: Quick Planning Templates

✓ Explore Phase Template

- Problem:
- Evidence:
- Root causes:
- Options considered:
- Selected approach:

✓ Prepare Phase Template

- Activities:
- Timeline:
- Roles:
- Resources needed:
- Risks/barriers:
- Success criteria:



✓ Deliver Phase Template

- Training provided:
- Coaching plan:
- Monitoring tools:
- Early signals:

✓ Sustain Phase Template

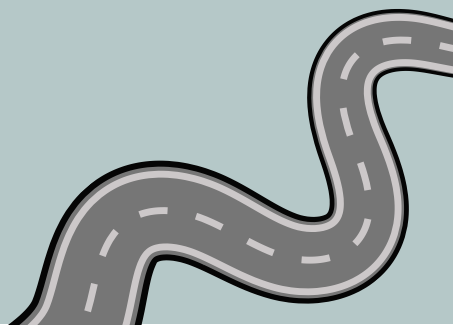
- Long-term routines:
- Staff induction plan:
- Review cycle:
- Scaling plan:



SCENARIO: IMPROVING QUESTIONING TO INCREASE PUPIL THINKING

(A full, realistic journey from Explore → Prepare → Deliver → Sustain)

Now let's see how this works in practice. The next pages take you through a clear, step-by-step scenario using the four phases: Explore, Prepare, Deliver and Sustain.



EXPLORE — Identify the real need - School Issue:



Leaders notice pupils give short answers and struggle to explain their thinking. Teachers rely heavily on closed questions.

Data Points Used:

- Lesson drop-ins show limited use of probing questions
- Pupil voice: “We normally answer quickly and move on.”
- Curriculum leads note weaker reasoning in written work
- Staff feel rushed and unsure how to model quality thinking

Root Cause Found:

Teachers have not had consistent training in questioning strategies (e.g., cold call, probing, wait time, elaboration).

Decision:

The school selects “Improving Questioning for Thinking” as a whole-school focus (EEF Strategy).

What this looks like in practice:

- SLT discuss evidence from the EEF “Metacognition” and “Improving Teaching” guidance
- Staff agree questioning affects every classroom, so it’s a high-leverage focus
- Leaders choose ONE questioning routine to start with:
- Cold Call + Wait Time + Probe



PREPARE — Plan the implementation carefully

What Leaders Do:



- Break the questioning routine into small, teachable steps
- Create a simple handout showing:
 - a. Cold Call
 - b. Wait time (3 seconds)
 - c. Probe (“Tell me more...” “What makes you think that?”)
- Plan 2 x CPD sessions
- Plan follow-up coaching (5–10 min drop-ins)
- Create success criteria for what “good questioning” looks like
- Anticipate barriers (e.g., staff confidence, timing pressures)

What Teachers Receive:

- A clear explanation of WHY the routine matters (Motivate stage)
- A simple, memorable structure to follow
- A video model or live demonstration
- A prompt card to keep on their desk
- A realistic timeline:
 - Week 1–2: Cold Call only
 - Week 3–4: Add Wait Time
 - Week 5–6: Add Probing questions

What this looks like in practice:

- CPD Session 1 includes retrieval of what makes high-quality questioning
- Leaders model the technique exactly as they expect teachers to do it
- Teachers practise scripting and rehearsing questions with partners
- Everyone leaves knowing the first step only, not the whole routine



DELIVER — Support teachers to use the strategy consistently

What Leaders Do in Weeks 1–6:



- Pop into lessons (5 minutes)
- Give bite-size supportive feedback linked to ONE step
- Offer praise when the routine is visible
- Share quick wins in briefing
- Re-model the technique where needed
- Remove unnecessary workload so staff can focus on this change

Teacher Experience in the Classroom:

➡ Week 1–2: Staff practise Cold Call

- “I’m going to ask a range of pupils today.”
- Leadership drops in and says: “Great consistency keep using names, then ask the question.”

➡ Week 3–4: Staff add Wait Time

- Teachers consciously pause for 3 seconds
- Pupils realise they need to think harder
- Leaders give feedback like, “I noticed your pause it increased the quality of responses.”



➔ Week 5–6: Staff add Probing Questions

- Teachers ask: “Can you expand on that...?”
- Pupils give fuller answers
- Mini coaching sessions reinforce the habit



What this looks like in practice:

- Staff feel supported, not judged
- Leaders use low-stakes coaching (NOT formal observations)
- Teachers discuss what’s working during phase meetings
- The questioning routine becomes part of everyday teaching



SUSTAIN — Make it stick long-term

What Leaders Do:



- Add the questioning routine to the teaching & learning handbook
- Include it in induction for new staff
- Revisit it briefly each half term
- Celebrate great examples in staff meetings
- Invite teachers to share pupils' improved explanations
- Add a new layer **ONLY** when the first is secure (e.g., elaboration)

What Teachers Experience:

- They are no longer “trying something new” it becomes automatic
- Pupils expect to explain and develop their thinking
- Lessons feel calmer, more predictable, and more purposeful
- They see real impact on learning and reasoning

What this looks like in practice:

- Department leads check consistency once a term
- New staff are trained so routines don't fade
- Leaders monitor only 2–3 core practices each year
- The routine becomes part of the school's identity
- (“This is how we question at our school.”)



SUMMARY TABLE FOR STAFF (Quick View)

Phase	What Leaders Do	What Teachers Experience
Explore	Identify need, gather evidence, choose a focus	"I see why this matters."
Prepare	Break into steps, model, rehearse, plan support	"I know what to do first."
Deliver	Feedback, coaching, quick wins, reduce workload	"I feel supported trying this."
Sustain	Embed routines, keep revisiting, induct new staff	"This is now normal practice."



The EEF Implementation Cycle

SUSTAIN

- Revisit and refine the practice over time.
- Embed into policies, routines, and induction.
- Celebrate success and keep expectations clear.

EXPLORE

- Identify the real problem using evidence.
- Understand root causes and staff needs.
- Select the right approach with clear rationale.



DELIVER

- Model the practice and provide coaching.
- Give focused, bite-sized feedback.
- Monitor lightly to build confidence and consistency.

PREPARE

- Break the change into small, teachable steps.
- Plan training, resources, and support.
- Anticipate barriers and create solutions.



EXPLORE — Template

Purpose: Identify the real problem clearly and decide what needs to change.

Key Questions:

- What is the actual problem we are trying to solve?
- What evidence supports this?
- What are the possible root causes?

Actions:

- ☐ Gather data (drop-ins, work scrutiny, pupil voice, outcomes)
- ☐ Identify a high-leverage focus
- ☐ Agree success criteria

Notes / Evidence Collected:

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PREPARE — Template

Purpose: Plan the change in small steps and ensure staff are ready.

Key Questions:

- What are the essential steps of this practice?
- What training or modelling is needed?
- What barriers might staff face?

Actions:

- ☐ Break the practice into simple, teachable steps
- ☐ Design CPD, examples, resources
- ☐ Plan coaching, timelines, communication

Notes / Resources Needed:

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DELIVER — Template

Purpose: Support staff to use the new practice consistently and confidently.

Key Questions:

- How will we model and reinforce the practice?
- How will we monitor lightly without pressure?
- What feedback will help staff improve?

Actions:

- ☐ Model the technique clearly
- ☐ Provide low-stakes coaching and feedback
- ☐ Share small wins and adjust support

Notes / Observations:

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SUSTAIN — Template

Purpose: Make the change stick and part of routine practice.

Key Questions:

- How will we keep this practice alive next term/year?
- How will we induct new staff?
- What needs to be embedded in policy or routines?

Actions:

- ☐ Revisit the practice regularly
- ☐ Embed into induction, handbook, and T&L expectations
- ☐ Celebrate and share strong examples

Notes / Long-Term Plan:

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